

## Chapter 6

# Communities and Base Reuse

Communities will have a wide range of experiences in developing reuse proposals. Even as the Commission conducted its review, a few communities were already developing plans for reusing base facilities. While short-term economic impacts from base closures are unavoidable, communities can take steps to mitigate these impacts and use the former base to stimulate new economic growth.

Full economic recovery from base closure is dependent upon timely disposition of the facilities and land vacated by the services. The Secretary of Defense should do everything in his power to ensure a timely transfer of these valuable assets to the local communities.

### ***MOBILIZING FOR REUSE***

Reusing former military base property offers communities the best opportunities to rebuild their economies. The buildings and facilities can fill residential, commercial, and industrial needs and thus can replace jobs and lost income. Airfields are especially marketable because of the national shortage of available hangar space. Several communities that lost bases as a result of the 1988 Base Closure Commission have taken advantage of this opportunity for a quick economic turnaround.

Attracting permanent tenants for the property, once disposal occurs, is an integral part of a community's strategy for economic recovery.

Successes can result from two things: early creation of an organization to plan and implement a suitable base reuse strategy, and aggressive marketing of base assets and available facilities.

DoD's Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) surveyed reuse of closed military installations between 1961 and 1990 and concluded that 158,000 new jobs had been created to replace 93,000 jobs lost as a result of base closures.

Communities can take six steps in preparing a strategy for reusing a closed installation:

- Form a reuse committee
- Work with federal and state representatives
- Maintain close relations with DoD
- Be active in the planning process
- Use federal and state programs
- Hire experts to fill any gaps in their professional staffs.

Each community will have unique opportunities and constraints. The successful implementation of any base-reuse strategy hinges upon harnessing the energy and creativity present in a community.

## **ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE**

DoD created the Economic Adjustment Program for this purpose in May 1961. Since 1970, DoD has rendered adjustment assistance through the President's Economic Adjustment Committee (EAC), which is composed of 18 federal departments and agencies and chaired by the Secretary of Defense.

EAC works with representatives of local, state and federal agencies to develop strategies and coordinate action plans that will generate new job opportunities and to alleviate the social and economic impacts resulting from DoD program changes. To assist communities, the Secretary of Defense can make grants to qualified local government entities for development of community-adjustment plans.

The transition period (often three to five years) in securing new civilian uses can be difficult for many communities. But the

experience of communities affected by earlier base closures clearly indicates communities can adjust successfully.

More recently, OEA has been working with 21 communities that are near bases recommended for closure by the 1988 Base Realignment and Closure Commission. OEA has provided \$1.6 million in grants to the affected communities to help develop reuse plans and is working through the EAC to help these communities implement their reuse plans.

## **Environmental Restoration at Closing Bases**

DoD is obligated under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act to restore contaminated sites on military bases.

Within the capabilities of technology and the availability of funds, DoD is committed to restoring closing bases to safe condition. The Department of Defense Base Closure Account 1990 can be used to fund this environmental restoration.

DoD also has several initiatives under way to expedite the environmental restoration process and thereby speed local economic recovery.

- DoD has convened a task force to report on ways to improve interagency coordination of environmental-response actions; streamline and consolidate practices and policies; and improve environmental restoration at closing bases.
- DoD has established a model program that will test ways of expediting cleanup and accelerating the contracting process. The program will also probe alternatives that will help

avoid disputes, provide concurrent regulatory review, and offer options for local reuse while cleanup is in progress.

- DoD is reemphasizing ongoing efforts, including expanded use of interagency agreements that detail restorations at National Priority List sites and memorandums of agreement between DoD and states for resolving technical disputes at National Priority List sites.

## *Homeowners Assistance Program*

The Homeowners Assistance Program, in operation since 1966, assists DoD military and civilian employees who are forced to move as a result of a base closure.

The government helps eligible employees who cannot sell their homes within a reasonable amount of time by either buying their homes for 75 percent of the preclosure-announcement value or reimbursing them for most of the lost equity should the homeowners sell the house for less than the value before the closure was announced. The program also provides relief for displaced employees facing foreclosure.

The program is initially funded with appropriated funds; however, proceeds from

the sale or rental of government-purchased houses replenish the fund.

## *Civilian Employee Assistance*

The DoD Priority Placement Program is another program that was originally established to help DoD civilian employees adjust to the base closures of the 1960s.

A state-of-the-art automated referral is currently in operation. In the years since its inception, the referral system has helped more than 98,000 employees find new assignments. This cost-effective system supports the Priority Placement Program.

The Displaced Employee Program provides for priority placement referral of separated employees to other federal agencies. In addition, DoD and the Office of Personnel Management have initiated a project to link data systems. Upon completion, the linked systems will support a significantly expanded Defense Referral System.

The communities that will lose bases as a result of the 1991 closure and realignment process face an uncertain future. Local leaders, with the assistance of federal and state agencies, can steer a path from economic dislocation to economic growth.